

Distance Learning: "What am I doing here?"

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I see a theme of sorts developing in some of the otherwise disparate conversations on DEOS which is very interesting. I read a posting today about how many professors want to avoid "marketing" because, down the road, this may commoditise education to the point where their students are customers and will demand things from them that are either inappropriate for their course of study or are just things that the professors will not be prepared to teach. I read another post noting that it seemed unfair (I am trying to not put words in people's mouths here) that they would have to take courses as part of a degree that don't interest them.

Of course this has happened to all of us whether at a distance or face to face. We have all sat in courses wondering "What am I doing here?" After some years being out of school I have come to the conclusion that some of those courses were really "out there" for me. But I came to appreciate the vast majority of them after having been in the work force for a time.

Universities and professors have to dance along a spectrum where, on one end, the university simply dictates everything that the student will study and, on the other end, the learners dictate what they want to learn.

Curiously I live in a province where there are universities at or near both ends of the spectrum and it is very interesting for me to observe the dichotomy between them. There is value in both philosophies I think. And there are problems inherent with each of them as well. The answer must lie somewhere in the middle. We have to recognise that:

- 1) Students don't always know what they don't know and so we all have to trust the universities and professors to provide the learning environment that has been proven best
- 2) Learners are more savvy than in my day (not that I am that old). There is more of an emphasis now on post-secondary education as job training (as much as it might pain us to admit) and so we do need to listen to them carefully.
- 3) Sometimes while specific courses may seem to be either really boring or a waste of time we have to remember that education and learning are long-term events. We don't know when a course or part of a course will be useful.
- 4) Finally (and I wish I had learned this before graduating) learning should be fun. So I always encouraged my students to relax and enjoy themselves.

Cheers,
Robert

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Take a minute to read this article. I have contact Robert Aucoin and he is most anxious to join our learning community for a short while. Email him your comments on the posting above and post your notes and his response on Week 11 threaded discussion. Thanks. George